CHEAP TRUTH 15

EDITORIAL. Science fiction today is in a rare state of ferment. This happy situation has been created only with great effort and must now be prolonged and intensified.

In this issue, guest agitatrix Hunilla de Cholo addresses her fellow Eighties writers, with a moving lecture on pluralistic Postmodern solidarity. We at CHEAP TRUTH echo her sentiments. We also regard much of her literary analysis as rank deviationist heresy. All the better -- honest controversy sheds light on truth. And in the meantime, we can use the heat to bring SF to a boil. We are pleased to offer her this podium.

REPORT ON THE SOPHOMORE CLASS DRESS CODE by Hunilla de Cholo

One of the regrettable legacies of the modernist movement has been the idea that perpetual revolution is necessary to "progress" in the arts and in the school dress code. Progress in the arts? In the dress code? Who, as we say, is kidding whom? A little reading and a little thought will make clear to even the slowest of the kids in class that the concept of natural and inevitable progress, mutated offspring of the Industrial Revolution, Marxist economic theory and muscular Christian ideas of "self-improvement," is a chimera. As some froggy wit once said, the more things change, the more crap you get on television.

Until recently Science Fiction High School, being the sandbox for SLOW LEARNERS that it has been for most of its history in America, has been relatively immune to such high-born notions. Sure, we had successive "revolutions" as Gernsback, Campbell, Gold and Boucher, Moorcock/Ellison/Knight, brought on his own version of the One True SF. But what did these vast and earthshaking changes bring forth: the SAME OLD STUFF, redux.

"Bullshit!" I hear from the noisy contingent in the middle rows of the classroom, the kids who wear leather and those funny sunglasses because they would like to think it makes them look tough like real punks. The real punks are guys who fall asleep in the back of the classroom; they can hardly read, let alone write. They're the ones who get "D's" in shop class. In gym they punch out these kids with the glasses for being wimps.

"Bullshit!" scream these honor students who run off their little fanzines and invent clever names for themselves like "Cyberpunks" or "Neuromantics" or, you should try not to laugh too hard, "the Movement." "Science fiction is about IDEAS. NEW IDEAS." "Say goodbye to your old stale futures!" "Take the ideas out of SF and it's not SF." "We are the pure quill, the daring, clear-sighted cutting edge that's writing about the FUTURE, NOT THE PAST."

Sure, kids. We all want to think we're the first to discover sex and dissolution and good writing. The truth is that the wonderful new IDEAS that we're always trumpeting as the justification for SF High School's revolutionary edge over boring Mainstream Central High are available three for a quarter in your local pop science magazine; even better, try PARADE, right after the "Personality Profiles" and before the cartoon about the dog. What we call a revolutionary idea in SF is usually something like Del Rey's "Helen O'Loy" or Godwin's "The Cold Equations" or Gibson's "Burning Chrome." "What a novel idea -- instead of having the robot be an emotionless machine, make it neurotically emotional, like a real woman, only better! Have it be THE PERFECT WOMAN!!" "What a neat idea -- instead of having the stowaway be a criminal, make it a young girl! And have the spaceship pilot throw her out the airlock instead of saving her, to prove that THE UNIVERSE IS INDIFFERENT TO PEOPLE!!!" "Wow! -- instead of having the computer expert be a nerd, make him a glamorous, existential criminal! He acts like Humphrey Bogart and loses the girl in the end! Not only that, he PLUGS IN INSTEAD OF USING A KEYBOARD!!!"

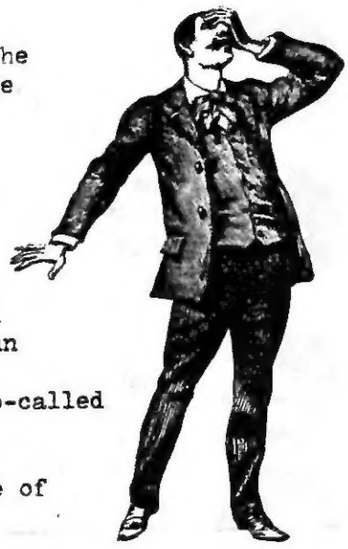
Old Mainstream High has nothing to compare with it, right? When in fact the only innovation these SF stories provide consists precisely in their adaptation of STYLE and TONE from outside the genre. Del Rey grafts the bathetic style of women's magazine fiction onto an SF plot and the fans eat it up because they're used to a diet of E.E. Smith and Harry Bates. They've never seen it before, it's a STUNNING NEW IDEA. Godwin borrows some third-rate existentialism (maybe, totally unaware of his derivativeness, he invents it himself!), spices it with a little "Invictus," writes in the same bathetic style Del Rey used twenty years earlier, and <u>voila</u>, another entry in the SF HALL OF FAME. Too bad Stephen Crane did it better, did it RIGHT, in "The Open Boat." We haven't read that, and besides, the SF version has a STUNNING NEW IDEA -- it happens in a spaceship!

Gibson borrows a style and milieu from Raymond Chandler or James M. Cain (and a pretty good style it is, too -- at least Gibson has some taste), pushes up the volume about fifty percent, has the caper involve computer information instead of cash, makes the break-in occur in "cyberspace" instead of a bank vault, and generates an entire new movement in science fiction. STUNNING NEW IDEAS you're going to be reading from the camp followers for the next three years.

The only thing we have to offer new, kids, is our individual selves. The most revolutionary act we can perform, as writers, is to cross genres, graft idioms from other kinds of work onto the SF subject matter. Style IS content. Gibson gives us something new -- a new style. Not because he invented it, but because he had the wit to see than an old style could be adapted to

our traditional material. More power to him.

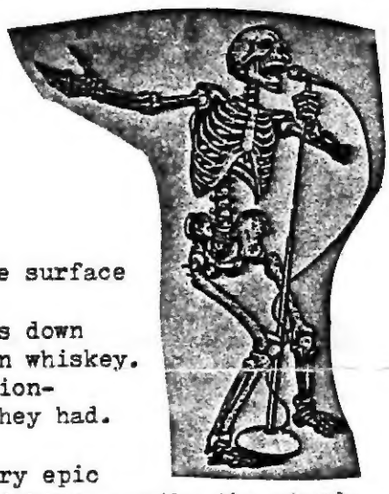
Yeah, we can talk about the future. But what we say about the future always, ALWAYS, says more about the present in which we are writing, about our own psyches. Ask Mr. Rucker about it in his Transrealism class and he'll explain it to you. Del Rey, all unconscious, tells us everything we need to know about male attitudes toward women in the 1930s. Godwin thinks he's talking about the nature of the universe and gives us instead sentimentalized right-wing political philosophy. Gibson tells us something about being deracinated in the Reaganite '80s, an era of dominance by corporate values and bland political conservatism. And we all have Sony compact-disk players and Braun coffee makers.



Yes, Michael Swanwick? The "Humanist" writers? No, the so-called "Humanist" writers are no different, only a little more obvious. They sit in the front of the class and wear nice clothes and are worried about their grades. They want to please teacher, so some of them have gone through a regrettable phase of imitation. "Yes, teacher," says earnest Johnny Kessel, "I read the assignment -- MOBY DICK, by Herman Melville. I can write like him -- see, here's a story about a whale." Please, boy, don't be so obvious! Go sit with Billy Gibson for a while. That's right. Jimmy Kelly is already over there making friends.

That's enough for today. Thank God school vacation is almost here. Let's spend a little less time at the library this summer, kids, and a little more time playing baseball. By all means, start a club. But let's not have a repeat of last summer's nastiness. There's room for everybody on the team. Dress whatever way you like.

CHEAP TRUTH TOP TEN



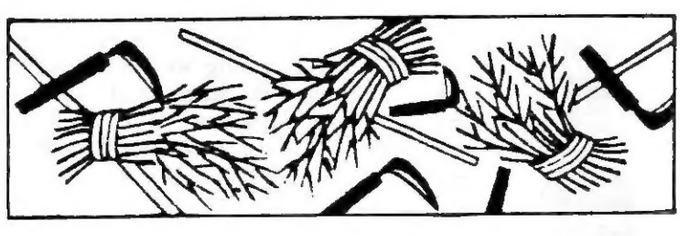
This latest edition of the CHEAP TRUTH recommended list concentrates on the fractious antics of the sophomore class -- especially the noisy contingent.

The "Funny Title Trilogy:"

FRONTERA by Lewis Shiner (Baen $2.95; Sphere L2.25) Gives the surface of Mars the unpleasant realism of the area downwind of Kiev.
SCHISMATRIX by Bruce Sterling (Ace $2.95; Penguin L2.50) Boils down the three-percent beer of space opera into a jolting postmodern whiskey.
NEUROMANCER by William Gibson (Ace $2.95; Gollancz L8.95) Fusion-powered icebreaker. Attacked for "flaws" its attackers wish they had.

ECLIPSE by John Shirley. (Bluejay $8.95) Demented 21st century epic of gutter-level weirdness and paranoid radical politics. In eighteen months the stands will be full of stuff along these lines.
HOMUNCULUS by James Blaylock (Ace $2.95) Latest effort in the Blaylock/Powers subgenre of West Coast Victoriana. Has the glitter of ANUBIS GATES with funnier characters and a better plot.
THE SECRET OF LIFE by Rudy Rucker (Bluejay $14.95) The doyen of Transrealism carries his doctrine to the ultimate in this crypto-autobiography. Features bizarre alternating spasms of existential gloom and manic farce.
FREEDOM BEACH by James Patrick Kelly and John Kessel (Bluejay $8.95) Lively and inventive fix-up by the Glimmer Twins of Humanism. Annoying metafictional noodling does not exceed the limits of tolerance.
BLOOD MUSIC by Greg Bear (Ace $2.95; Gollancz L9.95) Now in U.S. paperback. The ne plus ultra of modern radical hard SF.
ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE, Gardner Dozois, ed. ($19.50/yr.) This periodical has made such a quantum leap in quality that it is now impossible to understand American SF in the Eighties without a subscription. The current hotbed of Postmodern innovation, since Jan 86 it has serialized Gibson's COUNT ZERO and published the best stories to date by Cadigan, Kelly, Shiner, and Shepard. Currently featuring odd rumbles of militant pacifism -- an unexpected and interestingly ominous development.

CHEAP TRUTH 809-C West 12th Street Austin, Texas 78701. (512) UFO-SMOF, 300/1200 baud. Vincent Omniaveritas, editing. Todd Refinery, graphics.
NOT COPYRIGHTED. "When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro"



CHEAP TRUTH Letters Column
On-Line: call SMOF-BBS (512) 836-7663
300/1200 baud, 24hrs
Systems Operation: Shiva the Destroyer
Print version: 809-C West 12th Street
Austin, Texas 78701 USA
Editing: Vincent Omniaveritas
Letters mangled at editor's discretion

Title:LETTER FROM STEVE PERRY
Date: 12-03-85 Time:11;12
Dear VO:

I have decided that you need a form for criticism of your various scandalous articles. Your readers would certainly appreciate it, and it would be so much easier, since a simple form would likely cover virtually all gripes. No, no, don't thank me. I like to think I'm doing my part to further Truth. Especially since it's cheap. Best, Steve

To the scurrilous publication CHEAP TRUTH
Attn: Lying Editor
Dear Vile Scumbag Asshole:

How dare you insult AUTHOR'S NAME in your slimy, disgusting, despicable, libelous yellow-journalism excuse for a fanzine? AUTHOR'S NAME is a great artist, a (MAN or WOMAN) of consummate skill and God Given talent, and to even mention (HIS or HER) name in your filthy, miserable, bedbug-ridden publication is presumptuous beyond belief!

To presume to criticize AUTHOR'S NAME or (HIS or HER) work, BOOK OR STORY TITLE, merely exposes your stupidity! Compared to you, a moron is an intellectual giant! You don't know nothing!

Long after you are forgotten and rotting in the cold, heartless ground, AUTHOR'S NAME will be remembered as one of the finest writers ever in the APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE. Why don't you stick to writing about things you know, like all that cyberpunk crapola you skinheads like so much!

Sincerely yours
PSEUDONYM

(SF writer Steve Perry lives in Oregon.)

Title:LETTER FROM DAVID DRAKE
Date: 12-28-85 Time:14;00
Dear VO,

I don't think there's anything like the solidarity you assume among the folks you discuss in CT #13. Certainly not on SDI, where the opinions I've heard range from, convinced, to preferring the money to be spent on SDI — which won't work but won't kill anybody even if it does — rather than, say, Midgetmen.

For what it's worth, my only contact with Jerry Pournelle has been his fiction and half a dozen phone calls over ten years or so. He did me a major favor with his intro to my first book — but that was worked out between him and Jim Baen. DAVID DRAKE

(David Drake is the author of HAMMERS SLAMMERS and other military SF tales.)

Title:LETTER FROM RICHARD KADREY
Date: 02-05-86 Time:10;48
Dear V.O.:

In the first copy of CHEAP TRUTH I ever saw there was a mention of AFKAR INQUIRY magazine. I copied the magazine's address and when I was in London last year I tracked them down.

They have a small office in a rundown cluster of warehouses, print shops and fish markets in northeast London. The receptionist was dressed in a gray chador and seemed genuinely shocked that a fairly honky-looking American was interested in AFKAR. After I convinced them that I wasn't some anti-Islamic carnivore wacko, they were very friendly and gave me half-a-dozen copies of the magazine.

I also found out that they have a US address now:
P.O. Box 986 Corona Elmhurst
New York, NY 111373
Subscriptions are $25 a year.

Best, RICHARD KADREY

(Richard Kadrey is a San Francisco graphic artist and writer.)

Title:Politically correct rebellion
From: ORSON CARD
Date: 03-13-86 Time:00;16

I think every group should have a place where everybody says "Right on" or "golly yes" or "fer shure" or "fucking A" when they make politically correct statements. This is the fucking A group, and it sure beats hell out of Far Frontiers, which is certainly the "Yes SIR" group.

Still, Sue Denim's outrageousness is tempered by an inability to recognize when acceptably "rebellious" writers are in fact writing very traditional stuff. Like GREEN DAYS IN BRUNEI. A first-rate novella, and far and away the best one this year. But it stood out because of excellence, not innovation. It was one of the most traditional of stories. A save-the-world adventure epic, for pete's sake. Robinson was taking far more risks with GREEN MARS. But when you belong to a community that praises novelty as an absolute virtue (it may be shit, but it's NEW shit), then just about the only thing you can do with a traditional story that you LIKE is to pretend that it is also innovative.

It was wonderful indeed to read Sue Denim's barbarically clever reviews. I look forward to future entries. Now if CT could also reach beyond the group of people who utter instant approval . . .